

Message Text

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COME-00 SIL-01 LAB-04 /092 W

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R 061815Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4609

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 GEORGETOWN 0942

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ELAB, PINT, GY

SUBJECT: SPEECHES OF BURNHAM AND OTHERS AT MAY DAY RALLY

SUMMARY: CROWD REACTIONS TO MAY DAY SPEECHES BY PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM AND OTHERS MADE ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT WORKERS ARE DISGRUNTLED OVER LOW PAY, FOOD SHORTAGES AND OTHER SYMPTOMS OF A DETERIORATING ECONOMY. WHEREAS OPPOSITION SPEAKER WAS WELL-RECEIVED, BURNHAM ENCOUNTERED MUCH HECKLING DURING THE FIRST HALF OF A LONG ONE HOUR AND 50 MINUTE SPEECH. ONLY HIS CHARISMA AND WIT ENABLED HIM TO DOMINATE HECKLERS AND WIN OVER CROWD. THE ONLY CONCRETE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS NEW HIRE-PURCHASE SHCME FOR OBTAINING CERTAIN HOUSEHOLD GOODS, BUT HE MADE LESS THAN CLEAR PROMISES OF FUTURE RELIEF (I.E. MAYBE A PAY INCREASE AFTER A COMMISSION COMPLETES ITS STUDY). EACH TIME THE CROWD BECAME OVERLY UNRULY, HE THREW OUT A DISTRACTING TIDBIT OR ENGAGED IN A DIRECT EXCHANGE WITH A HECKLER, SOMETIMES SUCCEEDING IN INTRODUCING A COMIC ELEMENT WITH THE

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SITUATION AND GETTING A LAUGH OUT OF THE CROWD AT THE EXPENSE OF THE HECKLER. HE USED SYE DESTABILIZATION THEME AND ALSO CITED A NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE OF JANUARY 1976, WHICH REPORTED USG DECISION TO HOLD UP AID LOANS TO "PUNISH" GUYANA FOR UN VOTES. LATER HE CRITICIZED AN UNNAMED DIPLOMATIC MISSION, BUT MADE CLEAR IN DOING SO THAT HE WAS NOT REFERRING TO THE US EMBASSY. THIS WAS

TYPICAL BURNHAM DEMAGOGUERY, USED TO AMUSE OR AROUSE HIS LISTENERS AND DISTRACT THEM FROM THEIR DISSATISFACTION. BURNHAM'S PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND VOICE WERE STRONG THROUGHOUT THE PERFORMANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. THREE TO FOUR THOUSAND WORKERS GATHERED AT THE NATIONAL PARK ON MAY DAY TO HEAR SPEECHES BY BOYSIE RAM KARRAN, PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS UNION (GAWU), BASIL BLAIR, PRESIDENT OF THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC), AND PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM. IN ADDITION, A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CENTRAL WORKERS UNION OF CUBA PRESENTED GREETINGS TO GUYANESE WORKERS. A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO REVISE THE MINIMUM WAGE WAS PASSED BY ACCLAIM OF THE CROWD AND ANOTHER RESOLUTION SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO COUNTER DESTABILIZATION BY BUYING DEFENSE BONDS WAS "RULED PASSED" BY TUC GENERAL SECRETARY POLLYDORE BUT IN FACT MET WIDESPREAD VOCAL OPPOSITION. EMBOFF WAS PRESENT AND CHARGE TAPED SPEECH FROM RADIO BROADCAST.

2. DEPUTIZING FOR CHEDDI JAGAN, LEADER OF THE MOSCOW-LINE PEOPLES PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP) WHO IS OUT OF THE COUNTRY, RAM KARRAN LED OFF WITH A HARD-HITTING STATEMENT. HE CALLED FOR REDOUBLED EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL UNITY, BUT CHALLENGED GOVERNMENT TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO WORKERS' GRIEVANCES. HE SAID THAT EXCESSIVE ARBITRATION USED BY THE GOG TO RESOLVE ISSUES IN SUGAR INDUSTRY SHOULD BE REPLACED BY MORE COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE. HE CHARGED THAT AN ENTRENCHED BUREAUCRACY, CONFIDENTIAL

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WHICH HAS CONSISTENELY OPPOSED GREATER WORKER PARTICIPATION IN INDUSTRIAL DECISION-MAKING, HAS FRUSTRATED SOCIALIST GOALS. RAM KARRAN MAINTAINED THAT WORKERS WERE FACED WITH CRISIS CONDITIONS, THAT THEIR PATRIOTISM WAS STRETCHED TO LIMIT, AND THAT FAILURE TO DEAL WITH PROBLEMS WOULD RESULT IN CHAOS AND CONFUSION, AND A DECLINE IN PRODUCTIVITY. GOVERNMENT AND THE STATE CORPORATIONS, HE ALLEGED, WERE CHARACTERIZED BY FAVORITISM, CORRUPTION, AND DISCRIMINATION, AND HE WON CHEERS FROM THE CROWD WITH ASSERTION THAT STRIKE-BREAKING BY GUYANA DEFENCE FORCE OR NATIONAL SERVICE AS HAPPENED IN RECENT MUNICIPAL WORKERS' STRIKE WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.

3. TUC PRESIDENT BLAIR ATTMEPTED TO SPEAK AMIDST CHANTS OF QUOTE WE WANT CARRINGTON UNQUOTE, REFERRING TO FORMER MINISTER OF LABOR WINSLOW CARRINGTON WHO WAS REPLACED BY HAMILTON GREEN ON APRIL 6. AFTER MANAGING TO SPEAK A FEW PHRASES ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF JUSTICE FOR ALL WORKERS AND PRAISING CARRINGTON, BLAIR GAVE UP AND TURNED THE

PODIUM OVER TO BURNHAM WITH THE COMMENT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD RESPOND TO THE CROWD'S CONCERNS ABOUT FOOD, CLOTHING, MONEY AND CABINET CHANGES.

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4. BURNHAM THUS FACED DISSATISFIED AND RESTLESS AUDIENCE WITH CHANTS OF "WE WANT CARRINGTON" CONTINUING. SPEAKING FROM ONE PAGE OF NOTES AND AMIDST CHANTING AND HECKLING, BURNHAM BEGAN HIS ADDRESS BY STRESSING IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL UNITY TO ACHIEVE WORKERS' GOALS. THROUGHOUT SPEECH, BURNHAM EMPHASIZED THAT IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE SOCIALIST SOCIETY, THE VALUES INHERITED FROM CAPITALIST COLONIAL TIMES -- ABSENTEEISM, CONSUMERISM, ETC. -- MUST BE REPLACED BY INCREASED EFFICIENCY, PRODUCTIVITY AND SOCIAL AWARENESS. HE EXPLAINED THAT CARRINGTON WAS MADE CHIEF OF WORKER EDUCATION BECAUSE OF IMPORTANCE GOG PLACES ON REORIENTATION OF WORKERS' ATTITUDES.

5. STRESSING THAT THESE ARE DAYS OF HARMONY AND NOT STRIFE, BURNHAM STATED THAT WORKERS MUST BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN INDUSTRIAL DECISION-MAKING AND THAT LABOR AND GOVERNMENT MUST HOLD CONSTANT DIALOGUE. FOR THIS
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PURPOSE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING ADOPTING TUC RECOMMENDATION TO ESTABLISH ECONOMIC REVIEW PANEL COMPOSED OF TRADE UNIONISTS TO INVOLVE LABOR IN ECONOMIC PLANNING PROCESS. WORKERS HAVE RIGHT TO DECENT LIVING WAGE BUT THIS RIGHT CARRIES CORRESPONDING OBLIGATION TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY.

6. TO EXPLAIN CURRENT ECONOMIC MORASS, BURNHAM RELIED HEAVILY ON REVIEW OF PROBLEMS FACED BY GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY BAD WEATHER AND INFLATION. DESPITE DIFFICULTIES, GOVERNMENT HAD INTRODUCED FREE EDUCATION THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL, HAD MAINTAINED SUBSIDIES ON KEY FOOD ITEMS, AND HAD ALLOCATED G\$50 MILLION FOR WORKER HOUSING DURING 1977. PRICE CONTROLS HAD BEEN INTRODUCED, BLACK MARKETERS PROSECUTED, AND EFFORTS MADE TO REDUCE COSTS THROUGH CENTRAL IMPORTATION OF GOODS. BURNHAM CLAIMED THAT AN UNNAMED ENEMY HAD TRIED AND WAS STILL TRYING TO DESTABILIZE GUYANA. THIS HAD NECESSITATED LARGER EXPENDITURES FOR SECURITY FORCES. DESTABILIZERS INCLUDED SABOTEURS IN PUBLIC SECTOR AND CERTAIN PUBLIC FUNCTIONARIES WHO ARE DISHONEST AND INEFFICIENT. HE GAINED APPROVAL OF CROWD WHEN HE ANNOUNCED VEHEMENTLY THAT PUBLIC SECTOR MUST BE CLEANED UP.

7. IN LATER PART OF SPEECH, BURNHAM CONCENTRATED ON LABOR PROBLEMS, HE EARNED ACCLAMATION FROM AUDIENCE WHEN HE ANNOUNCED THAT NEW HIRE-PURCHASE LEGISLATION HAS BEEN DRAFTED WHICH WILL MAKE TERMS MORE FAVORABLE FOR WORKERS TO BUY GOODS. A COMMITTEE HAS BEEN SET UP TO EXAMINE POLICIES OF STATE ENTERPRISES CONCERNING WAGES, EMPLOYMENT, AND WELFARE PROGRAMS IN EFFORT TO STANDARDIZE LABOR POLICIES OF STATE OWNED CORPORATIONS. IN DIRECT RESPONSE TO RAM KARRAN, BURNHAM REVEALED THAT A COMMITTEE IS EXAMINING WORKING CONDITIONS IN SUGAR INDUSTRY, PROFIT-SHARING SCHEMES, AND INCENTIVES FOR WORKERS. THIS COMMITTEE WILL REPORT BY END OF MAY

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IN PREPARATION FOR RENEWED NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN GUYSUCO AND SUGAR WORKERS.

8. BURNHAM MADE SEVERAL FORAYS INTO DEMAGOGUERY. HE REFERRED TO AN UNNAMED COUNTRY WHICH HAD BEEN DRAGGING ITS FEET FOR THREE YEARS IN NEGOTIATING A "SIMPLE LOAN." HE ALLEGED THAT DECISIONS OF INTERNATIONAL MONETARY INSTITUTIONS WERE INFLUENCED BY CAPITALISTS. LATER IN

THE SPEECH, BURNHAM CITED THE JANUARY 1976 NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE WHICH, QUOTING A USG SOURCE, STATED THAT A DECISION HAD BEEN MADE TO PUNISH GUYANA AND TANZANIA FOR THEIR VOTES IN THE UNITED NATIONS. FOR HIS FINALE, BURNHAM MENTIONED THAT SOME FOREIGN EMBASSIES HAD BEEN INCREASING THEIR SIZE, AND IN ONE OF THESE--ONE WHICH DID NOT HAVE A CIA--A PARTY HAD BEEN HELD LAST WEEK AT WHICH THERE HAD BEEN MUCH TALK ABOUT THE SHORTCOMINGS OF GUYANESE SOCIALISM. IN A BELLIGERENT, EMOTIONAL TONE HE WARNED THAT SUCH ACTIVITY MUST CEASE OF CERTAIN DIPLOMATS WOULD BE DECLARED PNG.

9. COMMENTS: ALTHOUGH BURNHAM'S PERSONAL PERFORMANCE AS A POWERFUL AND QUICK-WITTED SPEAKER SALVAGED THE DAY FOR HIM, HE HAD ROUGH GOING. HIS RESPONSES TO WORKERS' ACCUSTIONA THAT GOVERNMENT HAD NOT DONE ENOUGH TO HELP THE SMALL MAN MEET THE BURDEN OF HIGH PRICES AND FOOD SHORTAGES WERE NOT CONVINCING, AND THE DEMAGOGUERY WILL PROVIDE NO LASTING SOLACE FOR GUYANA'S WORKERS, WHO DO NOT APPEAR WILLING TO BE PLACATED BY HOLLOW RHETORIC. FOR EXAMPLE, SHOUTS OF "WE WANT FOOD" INTERRUPTED BURNHAM'S COMMENTS ON FREE EDUCATION.

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10. THERE WERE A NUMBER OF PROMISES IN THE SPEECH--

THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD STANDARDIZE WAGES AND EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES OF PUBLIC CORPORATIONS, THAT THERE WOULD BE GREATER TUC INVOLVEMENT IN ECONOMIC PLANNING, AND THAT BURNHAM WOULD CLEAN HOUSE OF DISREPUTABLE PUBLIC FUNCTIONARIES--BUT SUCH PROMISES HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED BEFORE WITHOUT BEING FOLLOWED UP. BURNHAM'S CALL FOR REORIENTATION OF VALUES IS BEING MET WITH SKEPTICISM AMONG SOME TRADE UNION LEADERS WHO FEEL THAT THEY MUST SAFEGUARD TRADITIONAL UNION ROLE AS PROTECTOR OF WORKERS' INTERESTS.

11. INCREASINGLY THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS FORCING WORKERS TO EXAMINE PRACTICE OF SOCIALISM AS DISTINCT FORM RHETORIC. WORKERS SEEM TO BE TELLING BURNHAM THAT HE CANNOT BUILD SOCIALISTS OR SOCIALISM UNLESS ECONOMIC PRESSURES ON WORKERS ARE ALLEVIATED. AS REVEALED IN SAMPLING OF OPINION BROADCAST ON GOVERNMENT-OWNED RADIO, CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLIC REACTION TO BURNHAM'S SPEECH WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL. TYPICAL COMMENTS WERE THAT PRIME MINISTER MADE NO CONCRETE PROPOSALS TO HELP SMALL MAN MEET RISING COST OF LIVING.

12. THE CHEAP SHOT AT "CERTAIN DIPLOMATS" PROVOKED SOME POSITIVE RESPONSES FROM THE CROWD AND ENABLED BURNHAM TO ENGAGE IN A BELLIGERENT, BUT BANTERING EXCHANGE WITH THE AUDIENCE. THREE EMBASSIES--THE CANADIANS, CUBANS AND SOVIETS--HAD HAD PARTIES THE PREVIOUS WEEK AND CRITICAL COMMENTS ABOUT GUYANESE SOCIALISM COULD HAVE BEEN MADE AT ANY OF THEM, HOWEVER, FONMIN WILLS TOLD CHARGE THAT THE CANADIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER WAS TARGET OF BURNAHM'S WARNING. THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS--INCLUDING THE CANADIAN--HAS NOT TAKEN BURNHAM'S REMARKS SERIOUSLY. SUCH IRRESPONSIBLE DEMAGOGUERY INDICATES BURNHAM'S WILLINGNESS TO USE RHETORIC IN LIEU OF SUBSTANCE FOR POLITICAL PURPOSE. BLACKEN

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TAGS: PFOR, ELAB, PINT, GY, (BURNHAM, L F S)
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